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REPORTS ON U.S. SUBMARINE SPYING ON SOVIETS 25 YEARS OLD
WASHINGTON

Articles on underwater eavesdropping on the Soviet Union by U.S. submarines have appeared for the last quarter-century, and Reagan administration attempts to block recent reports of the operations are being countered by some who say they are revealing nothing new to the Kremlin.

As early as Aug. 28, 1961, at the height of an East-West crisis over the divided German city of Berlin, the official Soviet news agency Tass complained that foreign submarines had committed "a number of violations against the state seacoast of the Soviet Union" and were "making observations for intelligence purposes." CIA Director William Casey has asked the Justice Department to weigh criminal charges against NBC-TV for mentioning the underwater intelligence program on Monday and identifying its code-name as "Ivy Bells." Government prosecutors have yet to file charges.

And now, The Washington Post has published a less-detailed version of an article that President Reagan himself urged Post board chairwoman Katharine Graham not to print.

In today's editions, The Post said accused spy Ronald W. Pelton had allegedly compromised a "costly, long-running and highly successful U.S. operation that used sophisticated technology to intercept Soviet communications." The article, citing sources, said U.S. intelligence officials believe the Soviets had retrieved the "high-technology device" after they debriefed Pelton in two long sessions in Vienna.

The lengthy report described the way Pelton allegedly sold the information to the Soviets for \$35,000, but does not describe the device involved.

Reagan called Mrs. Graham on May 10, eight days after Casey threatened the Post and other news agencies with a 1950 law forbidding disclosure of information about secret intelligence communications.

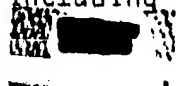
In the NBC report in question, broadcast Monday on the "Today" show, NBC correspondent James Polk said Pelton, a former employee of the National Security Agency, is suspected of giving Russia information on espionage gathering by U.S. submarines. Pelton is on trial in Baltimore on espionage charges.

U.S. subs began spying on the Soviet Union at the end of the Eisenhower administration, said American University professor Jeffrey Richelson, the author of books on U.S. and Soviet intelligence.

In 1974, The Washington Post described a similar espionage program which it said was called "Holystone." That report angered Pentagon officials, who later told reporters it had caused the Soviets to improve offshore security.

The following year, The New York Times published more detailed articles on the Holystone program, quoting high-level intelligence and administration sources describing it as a valuable tool for gathering information at little risk to the collectors.

However, the article said, the specially equipped Sturgeon 637-class submarines in Holystone had been involved in a number of mishaps, including two collisions with Soviet submarines.



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Among the intelligence coups in Holystone, the 1975 article said, was photographing the underside of a Soviet E-class submarine, apparently in Vladivostok harbor, the main naval port on the Soviet east coast, and tapping into undersea cables along the Soviet coast along which the Russians sent military traffic too sensitive to entrust to the airwaves.

Additionally, the article said, the U.S. subs were able to observe closely test firings of missiles from Soviet submarines.

After the 1975 disclosures, Pentagon officials told The Associated Press that specially equipped U.S. submarines gathered intelligence off Soviet shores, but denied that any had penetrated the 3-mile territorial limit.

Richelson, who describes the program in his book, "The U.S. Intelligence Community," said in an interview that he did not believe the NBC report "is something the Soviets will find valuable. The Soviets knew about it." Another expert on espionage, James Bamford, described Casey's threat as "the other shoe dropping" after the CIA director warned earlier this month that he would prosecute news organizations which report secrets about U.S. electronic eavesdropping.

At Pelton's arraignment last Nov. 27, defense attorney Fred Warren Bennett asked an FBI agent whether his client had been questioned about Ivy Bells, which the attorney later identified as an electronic intelligence gathering operation.

In a report on the arraignment that same day, NBC correspondent Polk said that "there are indications that Ivy Bells refers to a Navy eavesdropping operation. The Navy is known to have submarines outside Soviet harbors listening to what the Russians say." Casey, in his statement, did not mention the NBC report of Nov. 27.